

CHAPTER 8

ON IMAGINING ABOUT IMAGINING

It is ironic that those psychologies which seem to give the greatest respect to the imaginal have not inquired into the subject of what *they* have imagined about imagining. If, in fact, the imaginal is as integral a part of our activities as the modern oneirotherapies claim, then there is little doubt that one is imagining not just while participating in waking dreams, but also within the acts of theorizing about and doing therapy with waking dreams. Perhaps part of why the fantasies beneath the activities of imagining about the imagination, images, the imaginer, and imagining itself have been left untouched has to do with the nature of these modern imaginings about imagining.

The imagination is treated as if it were an internal place. One closes the eyes to the outside and gradually one begins to enter a sleeplike state of relaxation, as if one is travelling or falling into this interior space. Images begin to appear. At first they are fleeting and fuzzy as if one is on the outskirts of a town at dawn. Then clearer, more continuous. One believes that one sees the imaginal landscapes and figures as they really are. Amongst these images (primarily visual) are favorable and unfavorable ones. There seem to be unspoken criteria for judging some imaginations as sick and others as healthy. Therapy becomes viable because it supposes not only that it can evoke the imagination but that it can alter images and, thereby, the imagination itself. Through suggestion and restructuring (see Chapters 3 and 4) images can be influenced to change from the “outside.” This assumes a dialectic between an imaginer (outside of the imagination) and the imagination. The former does things to the latter. The doctor and the patient experience themselves as continuous “I’s.” The “I,” although connected to the imagination, is none the less outside of

it. One enters into a relation with images with this “I.” The “I” not only observes but decides how to act with images: how and what to say, what tactics of approach to use, how to relate the images to the concrete details of daily life. In the same way that it seems natural for the dreamer to identify with the dream ego, it appears natural that the imaginer should travel through the imagination in the figure that appears to be him.

Part of the ambiguity that remains in views on imagination is its status vis-à-vis “reality.” In one way its reality has been clearly substantiated by some psychologies, and yet even within these its realm of reality seems to be limited – not in a wholly rational way either, but rather as if by prejudice. The imaginal is real and present . . . but not all of the time. There are invisible fences (themselves ghostly images?) that attempt to keep certain provinces clear of the imaginal (to keep our awareness of images out?), as if to allow that if there are images within these boundaries they would decrease the sanctity, the reality, of the terrain. So images are real . . . but when we really want something to be real it should not have any images in it. This is especially present in that which we would like to regard as “true.”

Our ability to imagine such fences has allowed us to see distinctions between our daily reality and that of a waking dream, our ego and the images in the waking dream. These are the distinctions that give rise in part to the idea of an “I” outside of the imagination, going into it and exploring it. If such fences were not imagined, it would seem that even before we start to imagine we are already held within an image(s), acting out images, and responding to images (in this case the images of “going into” the “imagination,” of “doing a waking dream,” or an “active imagination”).

To begin to ground ourselves in the earth of the imaginal real we must work against the boundaries and habits that formerly were created to pull out and separate the notions of our identity from this ground. The activity of waking dreams can be used to perpetuate and to strengthen our attempts at separation, or it can serve to break through the fences already built. In the

conceptualization presented here, attention has been given to the relationships among the ego, awareness, and images. Our usual ways of thinking have equated ego with awareness, and in doing so they HAVE created a blind spot. Whenever awareness is subsumed by one set of images, it is unable to observe that set. It is possible, however, for awareness to be strained from the ego and by doing so to create a vantage point separate from the ego.

When awareness is identified with the ego, it is the ego's eyes through which awareness perceives. In this state the ego acts as if it is at the center of all that is to be perceived. It appears distinct from the circle of images around it, because it itself is unable to be perceived by awareness. All relating done in view of awareness is that of ego to other, of ego to image, of ego to object. However, when the ego is seen as an image(s) among images it takes its place on the circumference of the circle, and it is awareness that is able to reside in moments in the middle. This enables a type of imagining to arise that perceives inter-relationships among images other than those between ego and object. Once our awareness has succeeded in establishing itself independently from our egos, its later identification with any set of images would not remove them from the circles of the imaginal into a center of reality, but awareness would travel among images and would recognize them as such. The change in perspective could be likened to the one which occurred when people realized the earth was not the center of the universe, or that humans were not the first, and thereby most important creation.

If waking dreams perpetuate a type of imagining in which awareness is always dependent on the eyes of the ego (where earth is always in the center) and is unaware of this, one can observe a tendency to see all other images only as they relate to ego (all planets exist because of earth or are important only because of their relation to earth). That this is a perspective which exaggerates some qualities of images and negates others would not be apparent. The ego seems to try and subsume not only awareness, but imagination as well. The particular qualities of these is lost as the ego tries to make them mere satellites. It is

inevitable that the non-ego in this case is reduced to those terms in which the ego can perceive and understand.

To ground ourselves in the imaginal real we must have a means of uniting in our awareness sense data with the symbolic transformations it undergoes and of uniting symbols with the “reality” they create. These require not a fence, but a bridge by which the process of making metaphorical symbols can be followed. This is dependent on an awareness that can serve as an intermediary from the matter of metaphor to its other base in the immaterial, in the imaginal. Awareness allows one to travel from what is perceived to how it is perceived and back again. One knows not only the content of perception, but the imaginal context of perception – (which image) is perceiving.

Here (Chapter 6) it was suggested that different kinds of egos resulting from various processes of transformation, could enter into relation with the imaginal. Each of these transformations is based on the shift of awareness from identification with one group of images to another. These identifications determine not only our imaginings about imagining, but also how we act with other images, what we look for, shy away from, how we interpret, how we connect the experience of waking dreams to the daily.

By observing images we can determine how a single image acts differently according to which other images it is amongst. Through assuming the identity of various images that appear we can explore the interactions not only between ourselves as “I” and another image, but between any image (or group of images) and any other single image or image group. If we can experience that images have relationships together in the imaginal that are unique for each coupling, then we cannot fail to suppose that each image we encounter is different according to which image we ourselves approach it as. Just as one person evokes reactions of a certain kind in another person, so too do we (formed out of our identifications with certain images) evoke certain qualities in the images we encounter. We cannot suppose that the images we observe are simply the way they are by nature. We must take into account in our descriptions of them that they appear as they do in

a situation of being in relation to certain images, i.e. the ones we are at that moment identified with.¹

If we take responsibility for our creating part of the nature of each image we encounter in a dream or waking dream, then we must also re-evaluate our tendencies to censor images as unhealthy, bad, or crazy, and to subsequently deprecate solely the imagination for these qualities. If they are “unhealthy,” part of the responsibility **for** that must lie on our shoulders. We cannot so simply agree that that **is** the way the image or the imagination is. Some oneirotherapies, as discussed in Chapter 4, attempt to “strengthen the ego” (to change the images it is identified with in a specific way) by suggesting ways to encounter various threatening images. In this instance, it is seemingly acknowledged that the particular face of the ego creates and perpetuates the faces of the imaginal. If the ego can be changed —to learn new ways of movement — then the imaginal will change.

There is, however, a loophole here. The above theory assumes that the reason images are frightening is because the ego is not strong enough. This however is the way it would be imagined by the archetype of a strong heroic ego. It makes as much sense to say that the images are frightening because the ego is so strong . . . that they must be frightening in order to make their values known, to impress them upon the imaginer.

What is the image’s wrath that so threatens us? Often one persists in taking these images as evidence of literal harm. One identifies with the dream ego to such an extent that one can only feel identity as a victim, not as the other images that victimize. One equates ego with the “real” identity, and sees from this

¹ We must take into account that the relationships among images are not apparent to rational assumptions. The multi-faceted nature of each image makes possible a variety of extremely different couplings. In one instance a figure that appeared as a nun to a young man in a series of waking dreams was married (he found in a nightly dream) to a haggard but wise caretaker in his dreams. The nun’s rather nursing-supportive attitude to the young man was quite different from her independent airs with her husband.

perspective the threatening images as imaginal purveyors of evil, attempting to destroy the “real” self. But what if the threatening images are granted as much reality as the ego? If both are understood to be aspects of the personality with the same quality of realness? The struggle could then be understood as one between different ways of perceiving and valuing, embodied within the various images. To try and remove the individual from the struggle by strengthening one side must be seen and accepted as a decision based on the preferences and prejudices of particular images. If it is not, one becomes involved unconsciously in negating some aspects of the imaginal by calling them imaginal and supporting others because they are more “real.” Let it serve as a warning that when a therapist or an individual sides with some images against others, their victory must signal a defeat in some other corner.

Each image has its own set of values. It need not appear as an appendage of morality but rather as its preferred style of going about things or perceiving things. When an image is especially wrathful to us we can inquire into what its values are and how in particular our present way of valuing may interfere with it. By not giving all of our attention to kindly figures (those that seem to be at peace in relating to us) we can allow ourselves to be made aware of imaginal styles further in our consciousness from the ones we are presently identified with. It is possible not only to become familiar with them as distinct entities from ourselves, but also by imagining ourselves into them. The latter enables us not only to learn of the existence of the particular image, but also to view from its perspective the images we have been previously identified with. The distinction between them and us is simplistic because when seen from a position outside of theirs or ours, both parties, seem to reside in the same house. As long as our awareness is identified with the images that create our particular ego however (so that it can see other things but not what it is identified with) it is bound to experience a dichotomy between those images recognized as images and those not (those having to do with the ego). The notions that occur around the relation between an image

and the perceiver of the image (for instance, image as object or subject to perceiver, image as encompassing perceiver, or perceiver encompassing image) point to fantasies of space and place which determine part of the nature of certain kinds of imagining.

By disidentifying awareness with “ourselves” and allowing it to inhabit other images from dreams and waking dreams, we allow it the opportunity to look at “us” from a position where the imaginal role of “ourselves” can be more apparent. The more we find out about this, the more evident it will appear that our imaginings about imagination precede from the archetypal mode we are usually most identified with. If we could relate our thoughts on imagination to this mode we could use the nature of these thoughts or imaginings to describe this archetypal mode.

Each set of images we are identified with has us move in respect to other things, including the imaginal, in certain ways. The realm of action and decision making is one possibility (see Chapter 7). The ego sees itself as lying between the realm of images and the realm of action. To connect the two the ego envisions a horizontal movement from the image to the material.

From the point of view of the imaginal it would appear that the ego is not independent of images. It is not seen to lie in between action and image. Indeed the imaginal and the material seem to be laid upon each other in layers, and movement between them is not horizontal at all, but rather vertical. One is involved in moving in depths. Perhaps from an imaginal point of view the image is at the base of these vertical constructions. This would set in motion a downwardness, a movement always from the concrete to the image. It would be as Paracelsus has described it —from material to immaterial. From a dual perspective (that of metaphor) its motion might seem more circular — returning intangible to tangible and vice versa. The reduction of images to the concrete is abusive to the imaginal mainly because we have failed to see the fantasy in the concrete — in our facts and actions. If we did grant imaginal aspects to these things the association of image to behavior would not be a flat reduction.

Our attempts at exploring our imaginings about imagining are not designed to argue the validity of one way of imagining over another (although at points that has proved to be enjoyable, as I am rather fond of my particular fantasies about the subject). They are, however, persistent in urging that we see our views about imagination as real imaginings. That we ask at each moment *who* is doing the imagining. In this way we automatically widen the boundaries that we have initially set to the imagination. It is no longer a distinct place to which we go to receive visual images. It is present now (*who* is reading this book?) and we can be aware of it through our modes of thinking and acting. To be imagining and not to know it, to continually ascribe what is the work of images to the faculty of reason and the person of ego, keeps us away from the imagination not in terms of participation, but in those of awareness. If we continue to see from within a certain set of images and fail to hear what it is saying as metaphorical and from a particular viewpoint, our dealings with the imaginal will more firmly entrench us in our present unconscious position, will provoke inconsistency with regard to our dealings with images, and theoretical debates as to which findings about the imagination should prevail. The question is not which is better, but what each is imagining and what effects (in actions, thoughts, feelings, perceptions) that has.

The presence of images causes imagining, just as the activity of imagining would seem to create images. If we apprehend images around us and not the ones within us, we are aware of imagining in one sphere of existence and not in another. A waking dream or an active imagination seen from the perspective of one who is *not* usually aware of images can be envisioned as a momentary change in consciousness or awareness. For a few minutes we grab a handful of images which we can ponder and further mythologize. For those moments we are aware of image as image, but in an object sense. Image is image but only as object. This decreases our ability to see ourselves as image, our lives as being imagined — that even the most concrete and truthful aspects are in relation to the imaginal.

With our awareness that we are imagining (and are imagined), our intentions toward psyche themselves become of more interest. Which images do we wish to starve and which do we wish to support? Which image — of integration, of wholeness, communication, ego strengthening, politicization, of consciousness, self-awareness, alteration of behaviour patterns — do we wish to make the imagination serve? How do we wish the imaginal to be related to the daily? What ontology will we grant images? What section of our experience?

When we are aware of the action of images that imagine us into the specific shapes of our identities, we can see that the waking dream is but one instance of imagining. It serves as a training ground for our awareness of images. It is as if the dream and the waking dream take the elements of our lives and imagine (do “dream work”) on them. In this process they become other than themselves. They are made symbolic and their actions and nature serve to clarify the world of the imaginal that the activity of imagining creates. The fact and the thought, the plan and the decision, the child and the father, are returned through imagining to their places in imaginal space, in psychological space.

Returning there also, allowing oneself to observe and to follow the possible paths of imagining, does not change the imaginal as much as it changes he who comes to imagine as well as to be imagined. If one does not try to use the imagination as a tool for the extension and strengthening of the images one is already identified with, while remaining unaware of this intention, the activity of imagining can put consciousness into a different relationship to experience, both of self and not-self.

Historically it is the content of images that has caused people to judge the imagination as a god, demon, or muse. The content has given rise to ambiguous philosophies of how to deal with imagery. One can take some images as real, others as symbolic, still others as nonsensical; some as demons, others as wise companions, bringers of confusion or despair. The snare seems to be in the relative neglect of one’s relation to images. Being still boggled about allowing things into the notion of reality (which

seemed as if it must, against all else, be preserved) we have perhaps not allowed ourselves enough time with the image. We have not trusted ourselves to its depths and to its different ways of being. If we did our worries of content would eventually fade or at least take on a different significance. There would be no question that the image is real, nor would there be doubt that it is wholly different from our technical ideas of reality and yet synonymous with our experience of it.

Although any attempts to define the nature of an imaginal psychology must remain tentative at this point, it would appear that the idea of therapy would not have to do with changing images, but rather with changing our means of relating to them. Awareness would be a tool not of the ego but of the imaginal—in the sense that its primary purpose would be to apprehend images. Dwelling solely with the material aspects of external reality would be seen as a flight from reality (imaginal reality), in the same way as the ego sometimes perceives involvement with images as flight from its reality (Corbin, 1966:408). The ability to amplify images would rely less on knowledge of comparative symbolism and more on the training of the individual to be able to imagine in such a way that the connections between images can be perceived and understood experientially. One would become aware when imagining that the imaginal mode one is identified with is not only responsible for creating images but for limiting them; not simply for allowing them to describe themselves but for dictating the terms of description it will perceive and value. This process of allowing and limiting cannot be overcome for it is a result of the necessarily dialectical nature of relationship.

In order to perceive more aspects of an image it is necessary at a certain point not simply to perceive more, but to perceive differently. It is necessary not only to be aware of the images one is perceiving from and moving within, but also to be able to shift one's ability for perception and movement into other images. By assuming the identity of a different image, the image which is the object of perception appears to change. This change, however, is not inherent in the object. It is more aptly described as the

yielding of aspects unrevealed in the previous relationship, but able to become apparent on the occasion of a new coupling.

In dreams one notices that a character can at first be a sister, then a lover, then both, then a garden. The dream ego itself similarly changes identity. In the imaginal there is both a fluidity and a simultaneity of identity. When we attempt waking dreams within an ego model we freeze the possibility of our directly experiencing these characteristics. As soon as we believe our identity to be attached to one group of images, we limit the number and the nature of our relationships, as well as our experience of imaginal existence as a whole.

An imaginal psychology would proceed from the nature of the imaginal. The substance of this would be grounded in a phenomenology of images. This phenomenology would rely on the ability to be aware of which imagistic mode one is in, so that statements about images and imaginal movements are not understood as simply facts but as descriptions of imaginal relationships. Another way to describe this is to speak of ways or types of imagining. Each specific type of imagining is grounded in the identification of consciousness with an image. This image makes us imagine in a certain way and to thereby see all images from a certain perspective. A phenomenology of the imaginal is dependent on the endless discovery of ways of imagining — each yielding both a new vantage point to other images as well as a new experience of “oneself.” To extend the descriptions yielded by the perceptions and interactions of one imagistic mode, an imaginal psychologist would of necessity have to learn how to switch modes. To be able to shift with awareness between ways of imagining not only generates knowledge about the imaginal, but allows the imager to inhabit countless ways of perceiving, moving, feeling, thinking, being. By shifting amongst them, the lines of power between them change. Each way of imagining sets up a whole structure of relationships among images and experiences in general. The hierarchy and weaving of lines change their patterns as a different kind of imagining is assumed. Therapy based on an imaginal psychology would first of all encompass an

awareness of the images a person is presently identified with and their modes of being. The person would learn to know the images presently constellated in dreams, interactions, thoughts and feelings. He would learn to know them through various kinds of imagining — not just be imagining in such a way that each image is an object of the ego's attention. Therapy would not be concerned with introducing foreign images to the individual or with fixing the imaginer into one mode of imagining or acting. The object would not be to integrate images, but rather to become aware of how one is in image-specific ways integrated into them. To do this one must become aware of which images one is already in at different times.

The activities of recognizing and sorting the various images at the base of theories about and approaches to the imagination and waking dreams are crucial first steps, because although each image discloses experience it also limits and determines how we can go about imagining. Even further, however, our ways of studying and theorizing about the imaginal must proceed from an awareness of their own imagining. If they do not the imagination is literalized before we begin and despite our agility at seeing visions, talking with figures, and exploring under imaginal seas, we will have come no closer to being aware of the activity of images in the rest of our lives, and of the rest of our lives in the activity of images. The awareness that is needed — a metaphorical awareness — keeps action and image together. It allows the substance of images and the fantasy of thought and behavior to become apparent. The waking dream becomes envisioned less as an excursion to and from an imagination, and more as a means of growing closer to the imaginal reality of our daily lives.